

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORMSEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

WAGON BED SPRINGS

AND/OR COMMON

Wagon Bed Springs

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER 12 miles south of Ulysses on U.S. 270

CITY, TOWN

Ulysses

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Kansas

VICINITY OF

20 CODE

Grant COUNTY

067 CODE

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

## CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT  
☐ BUILDING(S)  
☐ STRUCTURE  
☒ SITE  
☐ OBJECT

## OWNERSHIP

☐ PUBLIC  
☒ PRIVATE☐ BOTH

## PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS  
☐ BEING CONSIDERED

## STATUS

☐ OCCUPIED  
☐ UNOCCUPIED  
☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

## ACCESSIBLE

☒ YES: RESTRICTED  
☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED  
☐ NO

## PRESENT USE

☒ AGRICULTURE ☐ MUSEUM  
☐ COMMERCIAL ☐ PARK  
☐ EDUCATIONAL ☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE  
☐ ENTERTAINMENT ☐ RELIGIOUS  
☐ GOVERNMENT ☐ SCIENTIFIC  
☐ INDUSTRIAL ☐ TRANSPORTATION  
☐ MILITARY ☐ OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Mr. Richard M. Joyce

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Box 532

CITY, TOWN

Ulysses

VICINITY OF

Kansas 67880

STATE

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Registry of Deeds, Grant County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

108 S. Glenn

CITY, TOWN

Ulysses

Kansas 67880

STATE

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

None

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

—EXCELLENT

—GOOD

☒ FAIR

—DETERIORATED

—RUINS

—UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

☒ UNALTERED

—ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE

—MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Wagon Bed Springs is located in a heavily timbered bend of the Cimarron River. Surrounding the grove of trees, for about two miles in either direction, is unbroken land, used basically as grazing pasture, covered with sagebrush, yucca and prickly pear. This compounded with the total remoteness of the springs, gives one the feeling of the "Jornada."

The old spring is very much in its original condition. Both the Springs and the Cimarron, when visited, were dry. The spring no longer contains water and is slightly overgrown with grass. Description of the original spring is found in the account of Joseph C. Brown, who surveyed the Santa Fe Trails in 1825-27 and wrote:

Lower Semaron Spring (Wagon Bed Spring, Grant county) is at the west edge of a marsh green with bullrushes. The marsh is north of the creek and near it. The spring is constant, but the creek is sometimes dry until you ascend it ten or twelve miles, where it will be found running. The stream is bolder and the water better as one travels up it. It is the guide to the traveler until he reaches the upper spring near eighty miles. Three miles above the lower spring is some timber, from which place the road is on the hill north of the creek for twelve or fifteen miles. One may then either continue on the hills north of the creek or travel in the bottom but the hills are best for ten or fifteen miles further, as the valley of the creek is sandy in many places. One must necessarily camp on the creek to have water, but the water is very bad until one travels a great way up it, as it is impregnated (with) saline matter, which, like fine powder, makes white a great part of the valley. The grass in this valley is not so good as that on the Arkansas, the land not being so good either in the valley or on the hills.

Interpretive material is limited. The Daughters of the American Revolution have placed a tablet on a relatively large stone at the entrance to the springs. The landmark plaque sits directly adjacent to this marker to the north.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1820-1850

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Wagon Bed Springs, sometimes called Lower Cimarron Springs, on the Cimarron River in southern Kansas afforded the first water during the dry season on the 60-mile stretch of the desert or Cimarron Cut-off Route of the Santa Fe Trail, after crossing and leaving the Arkansas River. It was the objective and stopping place of all travelers over the Desert Route of the Trail.

Wagon Bed Springs was an oasis on the route followed by most travelers to Santa Fe prior to the Mexican War. The Springs were located on the worst and most dangerous stretch of the journey to Santa Fe. Not only were the springs a welcome sight to thirsty travelers, but they also served as a watering spot for immense herds of buffalo and prairie animals, as well as for Indians. Its water has been described as "cool, sweet, and good."

The Springs were a favorite haunt for raiding war parties of Comanches. It was near here that one of their war parties in 1831 killed the famous explorer and mountainman, Jedediah Smith, who was taking a caravan to Santa Fe.

The physical integrity of Wagon Bed Springs is little changed. Though dry, the springs remain in evidence (see accompanying photography no. 2) as does the bed of the Lower Cimarron River. The property is under single ownership and is located just 12 miles south of the city of Ulysses, Kansas.

## HISTORY

The Cimarron River originates in New Mexico in the vicinity of Raton. From the New Mexico tablelands the Cimarron flows east into Oklahoma then north into Colorado and Kansas and back into Oklahoma where it finally dumps into the Arkansas and finally the Mississippi before it flows into the Gulf of Mexico.

Before the Mexican War, the Santa Fe Trail was primarily a route used for commerce by trappers, traders and soldiers. The trail linked Missouri with Santa Fe, New Mexico--then another country. Upon arriving in the area of the present town of Cimarron, travelers had to make a decision whether to continue along the much traveled northern route of the Santa Fe Trail which ran into Colorado to the approximate location of the present town of La Junta, then south into New Mexico and Santa Fe, or take the much more hazardous southern route. By taking the dry route, travelers could expect to decrease the total number of miles traveled by from 150 to 200 miles. Moreover, by taking the southern

(continued)

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route, the long trek over Raton Pass would be eliminated. This short-cut was thereby quite popular with businessmen and people in a hurry.

Taking the Cimarron Cut-Off was not a simple task. Just as today, the Cimarron was dry most of the year. The first 60 miles of the sojourn was most treacherous. During these times firewood would become scarce. In contrast to the hot days, night temperatures would fall drastically. Also, this short-cut traversed some of the worst Indian country on the frontier.

There were three springs located on the Cimarron. These were the Upper, Middle, and Lower Springs. The lower of the three was the swampy one bordered with cottonwood and tamarac trees. Legend has it that an enterprising traveler took the wagon bed of an old wagon and pushed it out in the swamp and piled stones in it to make it sink. As the wagon bed sank water rose inside. After that time the Lower springs were referred to as Wagon Bed Springs.

This 60 mile stretch had gained a reputation for the difficulty of its crossing. The Spanish had called it "Jornada de la Muerte" or the "Journey of Death." Unlike the northern route of the Santa Fe Trail, there was no well defined path on the southern route. Buffalo paths crossed aimlessly, and did not always lead to water. Jedediah Smith, known throughout the West as a frontiersman and explorer, had made a fortune by age 32 as a trapper. Smith had walked the great Death Valley and scaled the Sierra-Nevada Mountains. Yet, on the "Jornada" Smith finally lost his life.

It was during May, 1831, Jed Smith was leading a caravan west. Upon reaching the Cimarron, they decided to take the Cimarron Cut-Off. After three days of travel on the "Jornada" they found themselves hopelessly lost. Animals were near collapse. Jed Smith and Thomas Fitzpatrick set out to scout for the Springs. Fitzpatrick's horse collapsed and Smith continued on alone. Near delirium from the lack of water, Smith reached the Cimarron. He found a damp depression where he dug for water. As the water came forth he gulped it up. As Smith drank a band of Comanches came upon him. Smith was killed along with two of the attackers. The caravan did make the journey into Santa Fe successfully.

Wagon Bed Springs was the only watering hole on this section of the Santa Fe Trail. The small oasis was the life line on this route.



## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bieber, Ralph P., ed. Marching with the Army of the West, 1846-1848,  
(Glendale, 1936).

"Springs Now a National Historic Landmark," The Garden City Telegraph,  
October 5, 1962.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 4 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A 14 29,03,00 4,13,47,0,0  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B           
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C           
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

D           
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Joseph S. Mendinghall, Historian

ORGANIZATION Historic Sites Survey

DATE

STREET & NUMBER 1100 L Street, N.W.

(202) 523-5464 TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN Washington, D.C. 20240

STATE

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL   

STATE   

LOCAL   

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

Landmark DECEMBER 1960  
Designated: (NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)  
date

Boundary Certified Emergency  
date 11/17/79

DATE

4/24/79

DATE

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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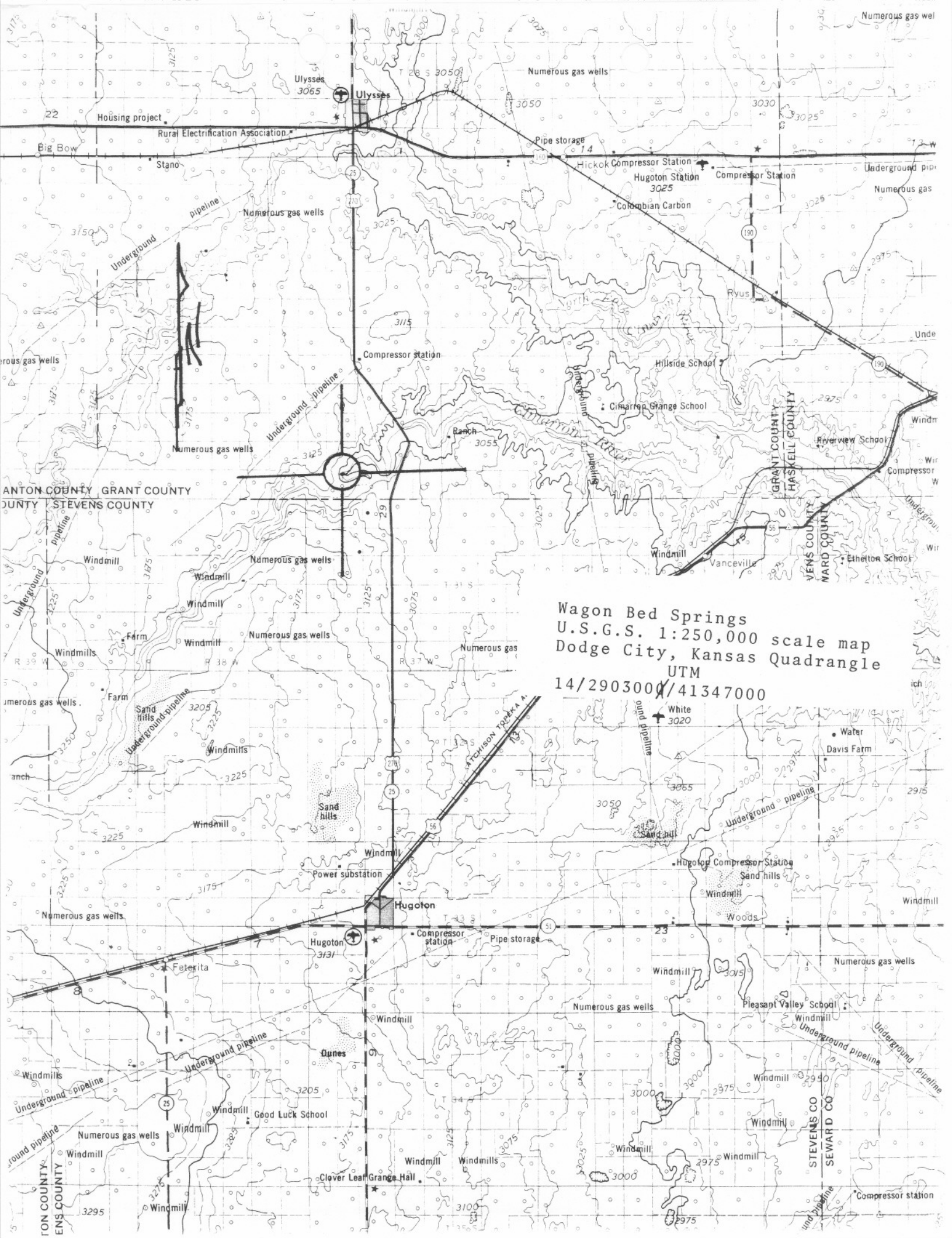
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1

Wagon Bed Springs is enclosed on the northeast and southeast sides by a fence and on the west by the east bank of the Cimarron River. This boundary is indicated on an accompanying sketch map titled Sketch Map Wagon Bed Springs.

Within this boundary are all the features which makes Wagon Bed Springs of national significance, the springs itself as well as the area of the original marsh lands.



Sketch Map  
Wagon Bed Springs

